

(Washington DC) This morning, Congressman Charlie Gonzalez and State Rep. Mike Villarreal held a press conference to remind last minute filers that free tax preparation is available. Speaking at the Bazan Library, a Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) site, Gonzalez and Villarreal emphasized that the program is designed to help qualified filers use the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC.) VITA provides free tax preparation for workers who earned \$40,000 or less in 2005 and the preparers file the returns electronically, which reduces the wait for refunds to 7-10 days.

“As we head into the last few weeks of tax season, I want to remind those who have not yet filed that they may be able to have their taxes for free and may qualify for the EITC,” said Congressman Gonzalez. “In 2005, 156,000 San Antonio families filed for EITC and received \$288 million or an average of \$1,846 per family. At a time when many working families are struggling to pay basic expenses, a refund of this size will help put food on the table or clothes on children's backs. But nearly 1 out of every 4 eligible filers did not use the EITC last year. If you think you may qualify, please visit a VITA center and find out.”

“VITA programs and the EITC credit are powerful financial tools for families and their communities,” Villarreal said. “Last year, more than 4 million people crossed out of poverty thanks to the tax credit. For many families, claiming the EITC is a first step toward financial stability, owning a home or paying for an education.”

Numerous analyses of the EITC have shown it to be the single most effective federal initiative in helping Americans above the poverty line. First instituted in 1975, the EITC was devised as a temporary measure to defray Social Security payroll taxes for low income families and to encourage parents to work. Made permanent in 1978, this program has lifted millions of families out of poverty and enabled them to invest in education, save for their future, or simply pay their bills. Yet, in 2005, an estimated 23% of people in San Antonio eligible for the EITC did not file for it, which means an estimated \$86 million in benefits went unclaimed.

VITA has 25 locations throughout San Antonio where qualified volunteers will help people file their taxes for free, which means filers get receive their entire refund. Moreover, returns are filed electronically which ensures that refunds are made within 7-10 days. The City of San Antonio and the United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County are operating the VITA centers in conjunction with the San Antonio Coalition for Economic Progress (SACFEP.)

To be eligible, a person must earn under \$40,000 and bring the necessary identification and tax forms, which includes a Driver's License or Photo Identification Card, Social Security Cards or Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers for all members of their family, all W-2 Forms, and all 1099 Forms. More information about VITA is available at <http://www.unitedwaysatx.org/Pages/VITA%20Opener.html> or by calling 211.

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